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The Fourth Rehearsal



Elaine Ingersoll Minick

The Fourth Rehearsal

BY

Elaine Ingersoll Minick



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BY ELAINE INGERSOLL MINICK

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First Presented by
Jacksonville Community Players
Jacksonville, Florida
December 12, 1921

Direction MISS TRACY L'ENGLE

Cast

HELEN GARDNER - - - - Elaine I. Minick

THEODORE CLEEVES - - - - J. B. Lucy

MR. LANGLEY - - - - Col. Walter P. Corbett

SCENE: Any Theatre in New York at the Beginning of the
Season.

TIME: Morning

Stage Decoration by Mrs. Francis L'Engle.

"Then came the fun of the evening in the rollicking comedy of Mrs. Minick's playlet, 'The Fourth Rehearsal.' To begin with, the lines are so true to what goes on in the making of a play and the sayings are so bright and witty that, with the well balanced cast, it was but natural that from beginning to end there should be only the heartiest of laughter."

(*Jacksonville Times-Union*, Dec. 13, 1921.)

The Fourth Rehearsal

Cast of Characters

LANGLEY—*A stage manager, medium height, rather stout, his hat on and coat off. He alters the angle of 'said hat with each change of emotion and crams it on more securely before venturing into an argument. He is smoking and chewing a cigar which goes out every few minutes. He has some ideals and artistic ability concealed—well concealed in his make-up.*

HELEN GARDNER—*A leading woman to whom acting is an Art—with a capital "A"*

THEODORE CLEEVES—*A leading man to whom acting is a business with a medium-sized "B".*

Scene.

Interior small cottage; door and window center back. Fireplace and arm chair right. Plain table with an abundance of writing materials two chairs and book shelves left. Chair against right proscenium with Langley's coat on it.

At the rising of the curtain—Cleeves is smoking stage center, and Langley is in the act of crossing chair in front reading from manuscript as he goes.

LANGLEY—*Interior mountain cottage, time summer evening six weeks later. George Harkness discovered at table writing. "All right, George." (Sits and tilts his chair back.)*

CLEEVES—*Drops cigarette, steps on it and proceeds to table, hangs his hat on back of chair, sits and registers profound absorption in composition. Dead pause.*

LANGLEY—(*Irascibly letting the front legs of his chair come down with a bang.*) “Miss Gardner—Miss Gardner!” (*Strides up stage and yanks door open disclosing a copy of “Vanity Fair” with a lady behind it.*) “Miss Gardner—your entrance please.”

HELEN—(*Rising*) “Mr. Langley, if you bawl at me like that I shall *never* be able to come on properly. I have to begin feeling the part a few moments before my entrance.”

LANGLEY—(*Returning to chair*) “I see. Will you kindly start ‘feeling’ as soon as possible, we are waiting. (*Sits*). ”

HELEN—Sweeps from the door and past the window, the picture of offended dignity and reappears almost at once the image of wistful entreaty. During her brief absence—

LANGLEY—(*In undertone*) “How long has she been in the business?”

CLEEVES—“I don’t know.”

LANGLEY—“Believes in acting a plenty when she’s got a chance, don’t she?”

CLEEVES—Nods, grinning. Helen enters.

HELEN—(*With great emotion*) “George! George darling! There will be something here to put my cape on, won’t there, Mr. Langley?”

LANGLEY—“I dunno; idea is to keep the set as simple as possible. Must you have a cape? Its summertime you know.”

HELEN—“The wearing of capes is decided by fashion, not the thermometer, nowadays, Mr. Langley.”

CLEEVES—“Would a nail do?”

HELEN—“Certainly not! What woman of temperament could hit a nail at a time like this. I must have a chair or couch—or something. You see I thought sweeping it off like this would be a gesture beautifully symbolic of laying aside all artificial defenses.”

LANGLEY—(*Anxious to dam the verbal current*) “All

right—all right!" (*Writing in notebook*) "One couch—for—cape! Go on, please."

HELEN—"George, George darling!" (*Refers to manuscript in her hand.*)

LANGLEY—"Say, what are you doing with that thing?"

HELEN—"This? Well, good heavens—you don't expect me to know my part without script at the fourth rehearsal, do you?"

LANGLEY—"I'll do all the prompting necessary; you can't act with your part in your hand! Put it *down!*"

HELEN—(*Shrugs, pitches it into a corner and commences again*) "George, George darling!"

CLEEVES—"Oh, Margaret, why—why did you come? It can't change anything. It only means sorrow for us both—"

LANGLEY—"You cross right on that."

CLEEVES—"Huh?"

LANGLEY—"Cross right!"

CLEEVES—"Oh sure! I forgot. Er—sorrow for us both. I wrote you—"

HELEN—"I know you wrote, but I simply had to see you. I cannot, cannot understand how you could leave a life of abundant comfort to bury yourself out here—alone!"

CLEEVES—"I am not alone."

HELEN—"Who is with you?"

CLEEVES—"Celia."

HELEN—"Oh, the colossal selfishness of men! You took advantage of her sisterly devotion to bring her, afflicted as she is, to this wilderness! Mr. Langley, I feel so wooden standing here all this while; can't I *do* something?"

LANGLEY—"We-el, the colossal selfishness of men gives you a chance to rant a little—about over to that corner and back—that's all the action I can see."

HELEN—(*Ranting a little over to corner*) “Colossal selfishness—sisterly devotion—afflicted to this wilderness!”

CLEEVES—“What makes one place in the universe any more of a wilderness than another—to the blind?”

HELEN—“Perhaps that’s true. But, dearest, what of you? Why did you leave me? What did I do or leave undone?”

LANGLEY—“Go over to him—go over to him—this is no telephone conversation!”

HELEN—“Er—perhaps that’s true!”

LANGLEY—(*Sharply*) “There’s no doubt about it!”

HELEN—(*Tartly*) “That is my line.”

LANGLEY—(*Consulting script*) “’Scuse!”

HELEN—“What did I do or leave undone?” (*Crossing slowly*).

LANGLEY—“Put a little action into it. Like this—see?” (*Crosses to table, lays cigar and script on desk, crams his hat on more securely, takes a hitch in each sleeve and proceeds to serpentine across the stage and twine himself ’round Cleeves, who half averts his face and gives several wriggles of distaste.*) “What did I do or leave undone?” (*Noticing Cleeves’ face*) “Say, what the deuce is wrong with you?”

CLEEVES—(*Embarrassed*) “Your acting is too good, makes me feel a bit ridiculous.”

LANGLEY—(*Resuming cigar and script*) “I see; well, get on with it!” (*Sits again*).

HELEN—(*Throwing her arms violently around Cleeves’ neck*) “Or leave undone?”

CLEEVES—(*Disengaging her arms*) “My dear child, you were smothering me to death—then—as now!”

HELEN—(*Backing away sobbing*) “How can you be so cruel?”

LANGLEY—“All the way over on that!”

HELEN—(*In midst of a sob*) "What?"

LANGLEY—"All the way over to chair on far side of the desk."

HELEN—"It doesn't seem natural."

LANGLEY—(*Impatiently*) "Aw—do it anyway!"

HELEN—(*Goes over and sits still sobbing*) "Go on, George."

CLEEVES—(*Coming to opposite side of table*) "Margaret, why did you marry me?"

HELEN—"I loved you—love you."

CLEEVES—"I wonder."

HELEN—"I have shown in every way I could, in word and deed. If you still can't realize it I can only wish my love were something tangible that I could take in my two hands and give to you." (*Stretches her arms across the table hands turned palms up and droops her head despairingly.*)

CLEEVES—(*With reminiscent tenderness*) "Poor little hands—in other days—I say, would you mind not letting your fingers twiddle like that, it's very distracting."

HELEN—"They are not twiddling."

CLEEVES—"They are—I'm looking at 'em."

HELEN—(*Makes her hands flat and rigid.*)

CLEEVES—(*With sarcasm*) "Great improvement, complete reading two dollars—any three questions on success, love or marriage fifty cents extra."

LANGLEY—(*Frantically searching 'script*) "I can't find that speech."

HELEN—"Of course you can't; Mr. Cleeves is attempting to be humorous."

LANGLEY—"Oh, he is, is he? Well, George, you get down to cases. It's getting on to lunch time."

CLEEVES—(*Back in character*) "It was the small success I had won and the greater success I might win that attracted

you, Margaret, or why did you make our life one futile round of social functions designed to exhibit your captive author!"

HELEN—"That is not true. I really loved you."

CLEEVES—"Margaret, love to me is like water, there can be no life, no growth without it. You would bottle yours—preferably in a carafe with silver trimmings and let it grow stale. I would have mine a deep wide river flowing down the years, making the banks to blossom—mirroring the glories of the heavens and bearing upon it dream ships—dream ships—laden with—to— what's the line, Mr. Langley?"

LANGLEY—(*Who has been studying the scenery intently for some time*) "Eh—Oh! Wait a minute anyway. What do you say we have the door moved further over here and then we could have the full benefit of the sunset light on Margaret's face all through this scene."

HELEN—"How do you mean 'benefit'—exactly, Mr. Langley?" Langley glares—Cleeves snickers—then—

LANGLEY—"Any way you choose to take it, young lady. What do you think, Cleeves?"

CLEEVES—"I'm afraid it would spoil the effect of Margaret's entrance."

LANGLEY—"Mabbe so and then you'd likely cast a shadow on her, we'll let it go. Where were you?"

CLEEVES—(*A little wearily*) 'Drifting down the river when last heard from. (*Taking script*) That is a long, talky one and I don't seem to know it. May I skip it, Mr. Langley, I'll try to learn it at lunch. Margaret, your cue is—worse than death."

HELEN—"And my happiness is nothing to you?"

CLEEVES—"Was happiness yours, Margaret? Happiness is no man's fireside companion! She is a nymph—shod with shilver shandals—whew—I knew I'd never make the grade with that! Better change it, Mr. Langley, I used to stutter."

HELEN—"Oh, don't do it, shod with silver sandals of fleetness is too pretty to change."

CLEEVES—"Let her say it, then."

LANGLEY—"She can't. What would be the natural thing for you to say just there?"

CLEEVES—"To be quite frank, drivel of this sort isn't natural to me at all."

(Pause during which Langley chews pencil as though to absorb inspiration from the brilliance of the varnish.)

HELEN—"Why did you accept a role so at variance with your nature, Mr. Cleeves?"

CLEEVES—"I needed the money, Miss Gardner."

HELEN—"I cannot understand anyone violating his artistic nature and debasing his Art by—

CLEEVES—"You'll find if you live long enough that the people who starve, *voluntarily*, for the sake of Art, exist mostly between book-covers."

LANGLEY—"Here— just call happiness a fleet-footed nymph and let her sandals go!"

CLEEVES—"Hm—er—Happiness is a fleet-footed nymph, those who catch a glimpse of her are lucky; those with whom she spends a single hour are blessed."

HELEN—"Words, words, words, how you adore them. You seem lost in a forest of them, raised by your intellectual conceit. If I, instead of being a jealous fool, wanted my friends to know and like you—I was exhibiting my captured author because it sounds more complicated and interesting. If my money made it possible to give you comfort and leisure in which to write, I was bottling love and letting it go stale. What I call happiness you term contentment and sneer at it as something dull and commonplace. Contentment or happiness—it was precious to me—our life together, the mere consciousness of your presence shut me away from the world's annoyances like a magic fortress of—ooo—ouch!"

BOTH MEN—"Whassamatter?"

HELEN—(*Startled almost out of her chronic pose*) "Only a hairpin—down my back—but it was so cold. I'm sure I beg your pardon."

CLEEVES—"Was it *really* like that with you, Margaret?"

HELEN—"It was; remember it when the frost of time has blighted the banks of your river and crusted its surface so that it can no longer reflect the glories of the heavens. Good-bye." (*Goes up stage towards door.*)

CLEEVES—"Margaret, I begin to feel—Mr. Langley, both of us should not turn our backs to the audience. Miss Gardner ought not to get so far up stage."

HELEN—"Yes—I ought. My part says: 'Turns round in doorway!'"

CLEEVES—"I can do as much as most men but I cannot yearn to the back drop. If I stretch out beseeching arms the best cut coat in the world will come crawling up my back and make me look as if I were slowly telescoping. Better move your old door after all!"

HELEN—"And ruin my entrance, I guess not! Why, I would be clear to center before I'd be noticed at all."

CLEEVES—"Of course, I can't imagine anything worse than that!"

HELEN—"Sir!"

LANGLEY—"Time! I'm going to lunch with the long-haired lad that wrote this thing and I'll speak to him about that point. For the time being, stand where you please, but get through with the lines."

CLEEVES—"Mind—I'm going to talk to you where *I think* you belong!"

HELEN—"And I'm going to stand where *I know* I belong!" (*Goes up stage.*)

CLEEVES—(*Down stage right—apparently addressing a phantom opposite him*) "I begin to feel I am the one who did not understand, Margaret!"

HELEN—(*In door center back*) "Did you call?"

CLEEVES—(*Still addressing phantom*)! “Can you forgive me?”

HELEN—(*Coming down stage*) “Do you mean it?”

CLEEVES—(*Taking her hands*) “I mean to try—I mean to make—Oh—but we’ve had enough of words! Let’s try the heart’s own language—so!” (*Embraces her.*)

HELEN—“My arm should go over yours.” (*Shifting her arm.*)

CLEEVES—“It should not—I am the taller.” (*Shifts his.*)

HELEN—“It looks awkward that way!” (*Shifts again.*)

CLEEVES—“It feels awkward that way. (*Shifts his.*)

HELEN—(*Exasperated, but still embraced*) “Mr. Langley.”

LANGLEY—“M—hm—I’m right here looking at you—and you’re both wrong. What you are doing looks like a Greco-Roman wrestling clinch more than a fond embrace. Get her over on your shoulder more so—this arm higher—this’n round her waist (*fixing them as if they were clay figures*). Now rest your hand on his shoulder, Miss Gardner; now business of long lingering kiss.”

(*With mechanical obedience their lips meet—as soon as they fairly touch Langley looks at his watch—and starts putting on his coat.*)

LANGLEY—“Look here, people!”

(*Helen and Cleeves look up, but forget to let go they are so intent on Langley’s remarks.*)

LANGLEY—“It’s after twelve; be back at two and we’ll polish up a couple of bits of business. The rest of the cast are called for the first acts at three—so be on time. So long! (*Exits right.*)

(*Helen and Cleeves look at each other realize their positions—fairly pop apart. Cleves selfconsciously straightens his tie—dives for his hat, exits left Helen ditto pats her hair, turns and goes up stage after cape with head a bit too high.*)!

(*Curtain*)

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